DIALOGUE:
WHAT WǑMEN ARTISTS NEED IS A THOUGHTFUL CRITIQUE OF CHINESE CULTURAL CONDITIONS

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TC 660H
Plan II Honors Program
The University of Texas at Austin

May 11, 2017

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Abstract

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Despite the meteoric rise and popularity of contemporary Chinese art, there is a distinct lack of Chinese women artists represented in exhibitions and scholarship. Women artists are said to have 'emerged' in the 1990s, a full decade after their male counterparts spent the 1980s experimenting with political and avant-garde art. This delay, I argue, is what has affected the representation of women artists. Why, then, and for what reasons were women delayed in their 'emergence'? To answer this question, I examine a multiplicity of patriarchal, historical, sociopolitical, and identity cultural conditions that have shaped – and arguably suppressed – the space that Chinese women artists were/are allotted. My thesis focuses on the '85 New Wave Movement, which is considered the post-Cultural Revolution/post-Open Door Policy, watershed movement for contemporary Chinese art, and the lack of representation of women artists during this movement. I argue that the lack of representation of women artists during the '85 New Wave is what delayed their 'emergence' until the 1990s, hindering their representation in contemporary Chinese art.

First, I establish two cultural conditions that frame and contextualize the climate going into the '85 New Wave: the Chinese patriarchy and (post-)Mao China. Second, I examine two milestone exhibitions from the '85 New Wave and discuss the lack of women artists; and scholarship that has been written (or not) by the eminent critics and scholars of contemporary Chinese art on the lack of representation of women artists. Third, I introduce and analyze three contemporary cultural conditions that are the crux of women artists' representation moving out of the '85 New Wave into the present: the government, *guanxi*, and feminism. Finally, I focus on the woman artist Xiao Lu and how her representation has been affected by the aforementioned cultural conditions. In conclusion, my thesis argues it is imperative for the contemporary Chinese art world to thoughtfully reconsider these cultural conditions such that contemporary Chinese women artists receive the full representation and space owed to them.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments

Dr. Janice Leoshko, for your creative support, critical eye, and kind, kind encouragement. I went at my own laborious pace and you supported me and my journey the entire way. Without you this thesis would not have made it to the press.

Dr. Chien-hsin Tsai, for your patient understanding.

Dr. Yunchiahn Chen Sena, for your inspirational course that started this all.

The Plan II Honors Program, for your existence and opportunities.

Friends, for your commiseration, friendship, and continued presence in my life.

Family, for your unquestionable faith in me as a fallible individual.

Xiao Lu, for your art and for you.

Without any of you this thesis would be for naught.

謝謝。

《致力於婦女，為婦女》

Introduction

The current art historical initiatives (or perhaps battles) to capture the development and milestones of contemporary Chinese art is perhaps second in effort only to the meteoric rise of the art that the scholarship is working to document. Each scholarly iteration attempts to make sense of a highly politicized and mercurial period, such that the complexities of Chinese politics, culture, and art can be better understood for posterity. In the short two-year window from the death of Mao Zedong in 1976 to the subsequent influx of Western thought into China due to Deng Xiaoping's Open Door Policy in 1978, the shift from the state-regimented socialist realist propaganda art to (post-)modernist experimentation is at once radical and multifaceted.

To narrow the scope of this project, I chose to focus on the '85 New Wave Movement. The '85 New Wave Movement (*Bawu yundong*; *Bawu xinchao*[1]) is considered the watershed avant-garde art movement that took place between 1985 and 1989. This five-year period is considered a historic ground for contemporary Chinese art. After Mao's death, the fall of the Cultural Revolution, and the implementation of Deng's economic policies, the next influential event was perhaps the repercussive Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign (*Qingchu jingshen wuran*). In 1983, conservatives in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) spearheaded the campaign to counteract 'spiritual' pollution, i.e., Western cultural and economic values.[2]

[1] Initially when Gao coined *Bawu yundong* it was deemed too aggressive of a designation by the exhibition's higher officials, as *yundong* 'movement' or 'campaign,' which is politically connoted; thus, *xinchao* 'new wave' was adopted as an alternative because it is less politically charged. This political Since then the two terms have been hybridized and are typically used interchangeably.

[2] For more information about the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign refer to "Realism, Modernism, and the Anti-'Spiritual Pollution' Campaign in China" by Wendy Larson.

Though the campaign lasted less than two months, the artistic community reacted in opposition and with renewed fervor by discussing culture and exploring the avant-garde. Thus, began the ’85 New Wave Movement.

The movement was named by scholar Gao Minglu in 1986, at the first National Symposium on Oil Painting (*Quanguo youhua yishu taolunhui*),[3] where he introduced and characterized the movement. Gao felt that the movement was an pivotal phase of incredible artistic creation and expression, propelled by intense discussion of translated Western philosophy, history, aesthetics, and psychology.[4] Within the span of two years, from 1985 to 1986, seventy-nine self-organized art groups, consisting of 3,475 artists (94.5% of whom were 35 years of age and younger), organized 149 exhibitions across twenty of China’s regional areas, undoubtedly producing thousands of artworks.[5] Moreover, artists and critics of the period not only made art, but they wrote essays, letters, and articles in discourse and in response to the movement.

The ’85 New Wave was not just a period of immense artistic experimentation, but of insightful artistic documentation. Many authors of these materials effectively documented the discursive ideas and practices that shaped the development of contemporary Chinese art; they were not only historians, but active participants of the art movement. Yet, from these primary

[3] The symposium was held near Mount Huang in Anhui by the Oil Painting Art Committee of the Chinese Artists’ Association in April 1986. The symposium studied the artwork of young artists’ groups since 1985, some modern and contemporary works from the West, and slides of works by Chinese artists exploring modern art.

[4] Gao Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011), 101-102.

[5] Tong Dian, “The Landscape of China’s Modern Art Movement,” in *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents,* ed. Wu Hung (New York: Modern Museum of Art, 2010), 67.

materials arises a disturbing problem: there is an overwhelming absence of women artists during the ’85 New Wave. [6]

In problematizing this lack of representation, I realized that the lack of women artists was not because there were no women artists during the movement. Rather, through noting where there are gaps in history, I note where the space and reverence given to men artists (and critics, scholars, and historians) to create and be represented was not the same afforded to women artists. This seminal movement of contemporary Chinese art – from when many of today’s famous contemporary Chinese (men) artists successfully expanded their careers into the international sphere – has forsaken women artists. In doing so, I offer an analysis of why and in what ways did women artists lack representation during the ’85 New Wave Movement.

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When conducting research, looking for pieces of women artists scattered in contemporary Chinese art scholarship, the consensus among most is that women artists ‘emerged’ in the 1990s. In fact, women artists’ lack of representation during the 1980s is accepted with the pretext that the general front of contemporary Chinese women artists instead emerged in the 1990s. If this is to be accepted – thus, to agree with the majority of literature covering contemporary Chinese art consistently agreeing that the 1990s were indeed

[6] The specific usage of ‘woman artist’ does not necessarily adhere to any official academic terminology. In most scholarship, women artists are either pigeonholed as a ‘woman artist,’ a ‘female artist,’ and, on the rare occasion, an ‘artist.’ Some scholars and artists would argue against this project’s explicit usage of ‘woman artist’ for creating a dichotomy that further differentiates and distances ‘woman’ and ‘artist’ by having such a gendered distinction; however, I balance my gendered distinction by also using ‘man artist’ (and ‘man scholar,’ etc.). This choice to make this gendered distinction is a wish to give agency to women artists in this project by also making the ‘artist, who is a man,’ into ‘man artist.’

the point of emergence for contemporary women artists – the resulting amount of scholarship covering women artists the 1990s should logically reflect a similar increase. Yet the scholarship allotted to those 'emerged' women artists is, in my research, never more than ten pages, and usually in texts that can average more than two hundred pages.

In comparison to the wealth of scholarship given to men artists, this lack of scholarship on women artists during the '85 New Wave reads as almost dismissive on part of scholars. Thus, in questioning this 1990s 'emergence,' I then ask: Why was there a lack of women artists represented during the '85 New Wave Movement? Why, and for what reasons then, were women artists unable to emerge in the 1980s alongside their male counterparts?

The typical counterargument is that perhaps there simply were not any women artists who had any significant contributions to contemporary Chinese art in the 1980s.

With this dismissal, I call upon Linda Nochlin's seminal 1971 essay, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" Though the essay addresses the problematic issues in the Western tradition, Nochlin's revelatory candor nevertheless extends into my own analysis of Chinese contemporary art and its lack of representation for women artists. Instead of examining women artists on an individual level to answer this question,[7] Nochlin flips the script and scrutinizes the institutional obstacles that have prevented (Western) women artists from succeeding:

> The fault lies not in our stars, our hormones, our menstrual cycles, or our empty internal spaces, but in our institutions and our education – education understood to include

[7] Which, given the reproachful question being posed, would almost seem like a manifestation of modern-day victim blaming – something that men artists, critics, and scholars inevitably do when they are unable to relinquish their power and privileges to give women agency.

> everything that happens to us from the moment we enter this world of meaningful symbols, signs, and signals.[8]

The fault lies not with women artists, but with man-engineered systems of female oppression. My goal for this project is to scrutinize the institutional obstacles – what I have termed 'cultural conditions' – that have affected the representation of Chinese women artists. I do not aim to give a definitive reason. Rather, by applying a critical feminist framework like Nochlin, I aim to show that the exclusion of women artists from exhibitions and scholarship is the consequence of cultural conditions that have curtailed and restricted women artists from the representation they deserve. My intention is to engage with a "sociological, and institutionally oriented approach [to] reveal the entire romantic, elitist, individual-glorifying, and monograph-producing substructure" of cultural conditions that have impeded the emergence of women artists in the contemporary Chinese art world.[9]

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My thesis examines the lack of representation of women artists during the '85 New Wave Movement in exhibitions during the movement and scholarship since. By focusing on these two categories, I argue how the lack of representation during this significant five-year period was caused by cultural conditions that are ingrained in sexist values. In this project, I attempt to bring together a multiplicity of historical, political, and sociocultural factors and values so that my thesis gives close attention to the sexist cultural conditions that hindered women artists during the '85 New Wave Movement.

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[8] Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" in *Women, Art and Power and Other Essays*. (Colorado: Westview Press, 1988), 148.
[9] Ibid.

I am not interested in defining the parameters of what Woman's Art is, beyond a simple classification of 'art that has been made by a woman artist.' What I aim to focus on (or begin the dialogue) is how this classification has time and again acted as an inhibitor of agency for the woman artist. Under the forthcoming discussion of cultural conditions that have actively worked against the Chinese woman artist, I define these conditions so that they may be further unearthed and dismantled (or begin to be) in future research. I pursue this project in four parts.

In Chapter One, I establish two historical cultural conditions that frame the gender discriminatory context for women artists going into the '85 New Wave: the Chinese patriarchy, as influenced by Confucianism, and the woman's return to domesticity after the fall of the Cultural Revolution. Chapter Two examines the two categories of exhibitions and scholarship by revisiting two major exhibitions from the movement and analyzing key scholarship, looking at what eminent scholars have said about women artists and their lack of representation. The lack of women artists in both categories will further elucidate the cultural conditions from Chapter One. Chapter Three explores cultural conditions that I have identified as the crux of the lack of representation moving out of the movement: the government, *guanxi*, and feminism. Chapter Four examines woman artist Xiao Lu and her career. This chapter analyzes the artworks in conjunction to Xiao Lu's lack of representation during the '85 New Wave, bracketed by the cultural conditions from Chapters One and Three. Ultimately, the four chapters together will expose that because of these cultural conditions women artists were not given space to be equally nor substantially represented during the movement, which in turn continues to affect contemporary women artists today.

Chapter 1. Cultural Conditions, pre-'85 New Wave Movement

Before examining the categories of representation that elucidate the lack of women artists during the '85 New Wave Movement, it is vital to understand the context for two cultural conditions that irrefutably influenced (and continue to influence) the state of contemporary Chinese art. For this project, cultural conditions are the circumstances that affected the way China's contemporary art world developed regarding the representation of women artists. As Linda Nochlin eloquently concludes in her provocative essay,

> The question 'Why have there been no great women artists?' has led us to the conclusion, so far, that art is not a free, autonomous activity of a super-endowed individual, 'Influenced' by previous artists, and, more vaguely and superficially, by 'social forces,' but rather, that the total situation of art making, both in terms of the development of the art maker and in the nature and quality of the work of art itself, occur in a social situation, are integral elements of this social structure, and are mediated and determined by specific definable social institutions, be they art academies, systems of patronage, mythologies of the divine creator, artist as he-man or social outcast.[10]

Nochlin's essay has been heralded as a pioneer in feminist art history, as the essay underscores that the systemic exclusion of women artists from the canonical history of art was the consequence of the totality of cultural conditions, rather than the arbitrary and autonomous idea of 'greatness' or 'genius.' Nevertheless, the insidious heuristic that preserves is the very idea that greatness and genius are bound only to man. Thus, when institutions of education and museums are constructed to mold and laud the genius man artist, there is nowhere for women

[10] Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" 158.

artists to enter that perpetuated space to obtain representation. Thus, to begin to understand how exhibitions and scholarship can reflect the magnitude of curtailed and restricted women artists, I focus on contextualizing two important developments of Chinese cultural conditions that took place before the ’85 New Wave: the Chinese patriarchy and post-Mao China.

Section 1. Chinese Patriarchy

It is important to first situate that China is a patriarchal society. For all intents and purposes, men have dominated every facet of Chinese society for over 3,000 years. The structures of contemporary Chinese society – and by extension, the contemporary Chinese art world – rest predominantly on Confucianism, which is a philosophical doctrine that promotes and emphasizes humanistic ethics, like benevolence, integrity, respect, and loyalty. At the core of this system is a particular emphasis on familial (filial) and social (hierarchal) harmony between people. In China, most, if not all, inter- and intrapersonal aspects of society and culture can be traced back to maintaining this harmony.[11] Over time, however, Confucianism has since become distorted towards favoring and perpetuating hierarchal male dominance and female submission, rather than upholding the harmony it originally preached.[12]

At the crux of this distortion rests the “Three Obediences” (*sancong*), which is one of the ideas that established the institutionalized and deep-rooted subordinate role of women in

[11] Zhuoyue Huang and Deyuan Huang, “Way of Post-Confucianism: Transformation and Genealogy.” *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 5 (2010): 558-559.
[12] Beverley Hooper, "Women in China: Mao "v." Confucius." *Labour History* 29 (1975): 133-134.

Chinese society. [13] Also translated as the three submissions, this set of principles established that a woman is to obey the following: as a young girl, she is a willing daughter to her father; as an adult woman, she is a worthy wife to her husband; and as an old widow, she is a good mother to her son. Throughout her entire life, under Confucian patriarchy, a woman under never possesses her own identity and is defined by her subordinate relationships with the men in her life. For centuries, Chinese women were treated as non-entities and China's patriarchal society fostered this perpetuation.

In turn, because Chinese society stresses the preservation of family lineage through sons, daughters are especially seen as undesirable.[14] Thus, the preference for sons led to China's alarming and sustained rate of female infanticide.[15] As technology advanced in the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries, especially in 1979 when China implemented the One-Child Policy, non-medical sex-selective abortions became more frequent and female infanticide increased.[16] The vastness of China (in both history and geography) and the proclivity of Western scholars to have exaggerated the extent of the practice has made it such that definitive data is difficult to calculate. Because the practice went unsanctioned for thousands of years, there is

[13] The "Three Obediences" are thought to have first appeared in the classical Chinese text, *Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial.* Correspondingly, there is another set of basic moral principles specifically addressed towards women: the "Four Virtues" (*side*).
[14] In ancient China, when a daughter was borne, she was automatically thought to be the daughter of her future husband's family and was doing nothing more than using the family resources; whereas, the son carried the family's name and continued the bloodline.
[15] Bernice Lee, Female Infanticide in China." *Historical Reflections* 8 (1981): 163.
[16] Jing-Bao Nie, "Non-medical sex-selective abortion in China: ethical and public policy issues in the context of 40 million missing females." *British Medical Bulletin* 98 (2011): 11.

reported to be 40.9 million 'missing' women from China's population.[17] Resultantly, there is a literal dominance of men over women.

The long-lasting ramifications of this patriarchal-motivated practice can be found reflected in the gender imbalance in education. There is a traditional Confucian view that 'a woman too well educated is apt to cause trouble' and so educational systems were aimed exclusively at educating boys.[18] As a result, there has consistently been less female students than male students across primary, secondary, and tertiary schools. There is even evidence of institutions of higher education setting much lower quotas for female student admission.[19] In this project's particular case, there is a parallel in the disproportionate number of female art academy students to male students during the 1970s to 1980s, when the artists of the '85 New Wave would have attended school.

Although there are no public records of or studies on student admission and attendance for Chinese art academies, I was able to use transcript excerpts of interviews conducted by the Asia Art Archive (AAA)[20] from the website of their archival project, "Materials of the Future: Documenting Contemporary Chinese Art from 1980–1990." For part of their project, the AAA interviewed individuals whom were key participants of the 1980s contemporary Chinese art

[17] Ibid 8.
[18] Hooper, "Women in China," 142.
[19] Yuhui Li, "Women's Movement and Change of Women's Status in China." *Journal of International Women's Studies* 1 (2000): 37.
[20] Asia Art Archive is an independent non-profit organization located in Hong Kong, China that has a catalogue collection of over 70,000 records of Asian art. For more, see: aaa.org.hk. For more on "Materials of the Future," see: china1980s.org/en/interview.aspx.

world. Of the eighty-five interviews on the website, only seven interviews are with women artists and one with a woman critic.[21]

When each of these women artists were asked about their art education one thing remained constant across six interviews:[22] they all recalled a disproportionate lack of female peers. Chen Aikang, who was professor to many now well-known men artists (Huang Yongping, Wang Guangyi, and Zhang Peili), recalls only two of the eight students she taught were women in that cohort.[23] Chen Haiyuan recounted how in the beginning of her print and engraving studies there were "many" female peers out of ten, but by the time she began taking classes she was the only woman.[24] Out of the forty students who passed the difficult entrance exams with Guo Zhen, there was only one other female student in Guo's cohort.[25] Similarly, in Huang Yali's sculpture class of eight students, Huang only had one female peer;[26] and the same for Shi Hui.[27] Wang Lihua was the only woman in her cohort.[28]

Moreover, what these interviews provide is a rare insight into women artists' experiences with sexism in the Chinese art world that otherwise is often not present in scholarship. Though the interviews' gender imbalance could be the result of a variety of factors

[21] The seven women artists are Chen Aikang, b.1945; Chen Haiyan, b. 1955; Guo Zhen; Huang Yali, b. 1954; Shen Yuan, b. 1959; Shi Hui, b. 1955; and Wang Lihua, b. 1955. The woman critic is Liao Wen, b. 1961. Of the remaining seventy-seven interviews, six interviews are with Western participants and the other seventy-one interviews are all with Chinese men artists, critics, and scholars.

[22] Shen Yuan was the only one who did not bring up her peers.

[23] AAA interview with Chen Aikang, china1980s.org. My translation.

[24] AAA interview with Chen Haiyuan, china1980s.org. My translation.

[25] AAA interview with Guo Zhen, china1980s.org. My translation.

[26] AAA interview with Huang Yali, china1980s.org. My translation.

[27] AAA interview with Shi Hui, china1980s.org. My translation.

[28] AAA interview with Wang Lihua, china1980s.org.

(like availability to interview), the disparity nevertheless reinforces a problematic issue behind the disproportionate representation: sexism in the Chinese art world because of patriarchal attitudes against women.

In the interview with Huang Yali, Huang recalls the following was said when she was assigned to the Hubei Province Art Museum after she graduated in 1978: "I remember when I was assigned [to the Hubei Province Art Museum], there was someone who said: what do we need a woman for? Women can only have children."[29] This sexist remark is a reminder of China's patriarchal society. Even though Huang Yali had graduated from a reputable art institute (Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts) and in theory obtained the same education as her male peers, she was discriminated against because of her gender. While the women artists were asked about the lack of representation for themselves, the men artists, critics, and scholars were not asked.[30]

What these interviews reveal is a reality that pervades through the contemporary Chinese art world: that it is a boy's club, through and through. From all-male dominated exhibition committees to art groups,[31] art magazine editors to professors, there is rarely ever a woman in those positions and those spaces. In 1984, Deng Xiaoping called upon "Young art critics, art professors, and administrators notable for their professional talent rather than their ideological orthodoxy, and with no attachment to the [Communist] status quo … to work in

[29] AAA interview with Huang Yali, china1980s.org. My translation.
[30] In fact, most the time when a woman was brought up was to talk about a girlfriend.
[31] Arguably one of the most famous art groups, Stars, only had one visible female member: Li Shuang. In fact, besides Xiao Lu, Li is the only identifiable women artist in photographs from the '85 New Wave.

important editorial, curatorial, and instructional positions" to replace older party cadres.[32] There was no doubt that he was only addressing men.

While the contemporary Chinese woman may no longer identify as a 'Confucian woman,' she is nevertheless entrenched in the influence of this cultural condition. Whether men are consciously aware of their position in the patriarchy, they nevertheless perpetuate it when there is no initiative to change the inequality. Instead, the burden remains on women artists and critics to illuminate the lack of representation, while men artists, critics, and scholars amble through. The Chinese patriarchy is not only just hierarchal and male-dominated, but it is also female-oppressive. Women artists have not been given space in the Chinese patriarchy and tradition to gain representation. The Chinese art world is not just a reflection of China's patriarchal society, but a manifestation of it in its entirety.

Section 2. (Post-)Mao China

During the Cultural Revolution, Chairman Mao Zedong uttered his famous proclamation, "Women hold up half the sky" (*funu nengding banbiantian*). Mao ostensibly argued that Chinese women's problems were (politically) tied to the nation's wellbeing; the nation's liberation was contingent on women's liberation: gender equality. At this utterance, the CCP campaigned for a new society that championed the emancipation of women from the so-called feudalist, Confucian hierarchies of the past. This social equalization dictated that anyone could achieve a goal, and women wanted to achieve emancipation.

[32] Julie Andrews and Kuiyi Shen, *The Art of Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 214.

Chinese women had all the reason and desire to support and join Mao's liberation movement. Due to China's Confucian-driven patriarchy, women had been facing foot-binding, fear of abandonment, and a lack of education. Thus, women were more than willing to take what they could get from the Cultural Revolution and join in arms with the movement. In July 1966, the People's Daily (the biggest newspaper group in China, as well as the official newspaper of the CCP) declared "times have changed, and men and women are on an equal footing. The women comrades can do what the male comrades do."[33] There were positive results of Mao's movement, relative to the previous status of women.

However, the veneer of this false liberation cracks when one examines Cultural Revolutionist propaganda posters. In order to establish political control and economic rebuilding, the CCP maintained cultural control using propaganda posters.[34] Propaganda posters idealized Mao's communist woman: defeminized and masculinized. The posters insistently implied that in order to contribute to the revolution, the first step for a woman is to relinquish the feminine qualities about themselves. A popular propaganda poster, *Fully Criticize the Chinese Khrushchev from a Political, Ideological and Theoretical Perspective* (fig. 1), depicts a hyper-masculinized woman. The woman's overall stature is stockier, her chest is obscured by a comrade's muscular forearm, and if not for the longer hair, a viewer would not be able to distinguish the woman from her male comrades. During this era, women were driven to

[33] Paul John Bailey, *Women and Gender in Twentieth-Century China*, Gender and History (Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 122.
[34] Kathleen M. Ryor, "Transformations" from *Chinese Art at the Crossroads: Between Past and Future, Between East and West,* ed. Wu Hung (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), 22.

suppress their feminine states to be the same as men. Nevertheless, this repressed state of being was not enough to gain true emancipation.

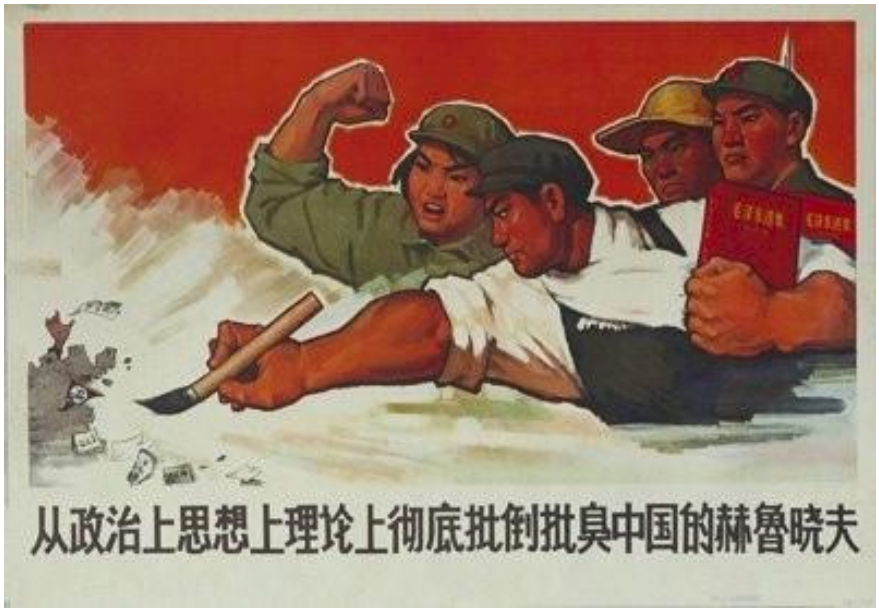

Figure 1. Anonymous, *Fully Criticize the Chinese Khrushchev from a Political, Ideological and Theoretical Perspective* (1967).

While the lives of Chinese women were changed by Mao during the Cultural Revolution, his promise of gender equality was ultimately nothing more than a false front. According to Li Xiaojiang, a leading scholar in Women's Studies in the 1980s, "Maoist culture had obliterated natural sex differences and denaturalized women's bodies by requiring psychological conformity to a male standard even while controlling women's bodies for the purposes of reproducing state citizenry."[35] Thus, a woman's dehumanization took place most trenchantly at the level of the female body. In order to achieve liberation, women had to divest themselves of the qualities that they were working to liberate. Mao had manipulated women into thinking

[35] Sasha Su-Ling Welland, "What Women Will Have Been: Reassessing Feminist Cultural Production in China: A Review Essay," *Signs* 21 (2006): 954.

their emancipation was for themselves, when it was in fact for men and women had to shed themselves in the process.

Women also faced the weight of the double burden. Women were not only working outside of the home, in the same capacity and productivity as men, but they were also expected to continue their obligations as wives and mothers (typically without any help from their husbands). In actuality, the women's movement was a male-driven pursuit in reality and women's liberation in name. Women who joined in the beginning engaged in the struggles of feminist groups. However, after joining the Community Party, they were to subordinate their feminist demands to the political struggle, believing that the "class" question should supersede the feminine question.

Consequently, all questions involving the transformation of society as to family, sexuality, relationship between the sexes, were suppressed and were considered of secondary purpose. Ultimately, the CCP may have brought new political, social, and cultural changes to China, but those changes ultimately were for the benefit of men. The CCP's attempts to ostensibly liberate women were superficial in longevity and in intention. The women's liberation movement evolved into that of a socialist class struggle rather than that of gender equality. The interests of class, politics, and men were yet again placed before those of women.

Thus, when the Cultural Revolution ended, it is no wonder that women instead chose to return to the sphere of domesticity. Though there were women who chose to continue striving for emancipation, as those in the Women's Federation (*Fulian*), many women chose to return to a space that they were comfortable in, even if it was a return into a space that Western feminists deemed backwards. While men reveled in the subsequent influx of Western ideas

with Deng's Open Door Policies, i.e., the cultural/reading fever, "women were observed to uphold gender differences as a reaction against the suppression of gender during the Cultural Revolution."[36] This return to domesticity is also reflected in the early 1980s, when a similar academic interest in gender difference flourished. According to scholar Wang Zheng, this interest was Chinese women's response to the gender repression and politically volatile years of the Cultural Revolution.[37]

In turn, woman scholar Liao Wen notes how women artists' subject matters after the Cultural Revolution are more feminine: portraits, landscapes, flowers – introspective and feminist subject matters. The majority of women artists were not interested in the cultural fever of the West as their male compatriots. Artists Xiao Lu and Zhen Guo have both stated that neither are very good with explaining their artworks and methods with words or concepts, as men artists could supposedly articulate. Furthermore, woman scholar Xu Hong also noted that "Female painters don't concern themselves with culture at large or society, they are only concerned with the trivialities that surround them and personal emotions' (in a society controlled by men, women have only been permitted to do so)"[38] In contrast, men artists made highly political and controversial art in reaction to Mao, the Cultural Revolution, and the West. Men artists were trying to "provoke authority while trying to stimulate thought among the populace […] seeking to enlighten the masses […] growing out of Mao's revolutionary legacy."[39]

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[36] Liao Wen, AAA interview, November 6, 2007.
[37] Wang Zheng, "Research on Women in Contemporary China," in *Guide to Women's Studies in China,* ed. Gail Hershatter (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley, Center for Chinese Studies, 1998), 8-9.
[38] Xu Hong, "Walking Out of the Abyss: My Feminist Critique," in *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents*, ed. by Wu Hung (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2010), 193-94.
[39] Gao, *Total Modernity,* 4.

As noted by philosopher and critic Julia Kristeva on Chinese women "What strikes [her] is that women often keep out of the way or on the sidelines of the most interesting and unusual advancements of our culture, and when it is a question of feminine production, they demonstrate if not sentimentalism, at least romanticism. In any event, they do not view themselves as a part of the development of the avant-garde and new epistemes."[40] What I understand from this is that women artists are not making art that aligns with much of the content; not up to par with the male standard of political art. When in reality, there is the argument that all women's art is political in nature given the internal expression of self, i.e., other, that women artists display to the world in their art.

The nature of women's art is classified to be feminine because the subject matter is immediately judged as a woman's experience, which is inherently "other" from the universal standard: a man's experience. Women artists are thus seen as others to men artists; women artists do not make art that follows the male standard. Hypothetically, even if women artists did make art that matched all the same qualities of men artists, they are still women, nullifying a great deal of women agency. What we find is that the real underlying problem does not rest in the concept of what femininity or womanhood is but rather on the misconceptions proposed by the patriarchal society of what art is.

In conclusion, the cultural condition continues to belay women (artists) are entering the '85 New Wave Movement at a significant representational disadvantage.

[40] Josette Féral, Julia Kristeva, and Penny Kritzman, "China, Women and the Symbolic An Interview with Julia Kristeva." *SubStance* 5 13 (1976): 17.

Chapter 2. Representation

This chapter lays out the importance of exhibitions and scholarship in shaping the representation of artists in history, particular to the ’85 New Wave Movement. Representation, for the expressed point of this project, is about the recognition that artists receive for the art they create through representation in exhibitions and scholarship. “Artists rely on critics and audiences to evaluate their work in order to gain recognition and acclaim.”[41] I situate these exhibitions and scholarship in relation to the cultural conditions of the developing contemporary Chinese art world to establish the limits, norms, and codes of these categories of representation and to ascertain the implications on later generations of women artists.

Before the advent of the Internet, the first point of contact with an artist is through physically seeing her art, and the only way someone could see an artwork was either in person or reproduced on paper. During this time, by the most traditional and straightforward means, one would attend an exhibition in a museum and see the art on display. The more convenient means of seeing an artist’s work would be through a book or arts magazine, i.e., scholarship, where both images and information cohabit. Both means of exposure to an artist and her work form the basis of how that artist is represented in the art world and society, and ultimately, in history. Without representation in exhibitions or scholarship, the artist and her art are lost to posterity.

To locate the impact of the Chinese patriarchy and (post-)Mao China in the context to the ’85 New Wave, I now focus on the contents of two milestone exhibitions in the ’85 New

[41] Michael Keane, *Creative Industries in China* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 148.

Wave, and a survey of the available English scholarship on contemporary Chinese art, most of which is published by men critics and scholars. By examining the makeup of the exhibitions and the inclusion (or lack thereof) of women's voices in the scholarship, the reader will plainly see the distinct lack of representation of women artists in the both the immediate time of the '85 New Wave and in the recorded history. It was this lack of representation during this seminal time that dovetailed to establish a precedence entering into the 1990s (the globalization of contemporary Chinese art) of men artists and their subject matters as the face/representatives of contemporary Chinese art. Women artists are effectively placed in the periphery, in part due to the cultural conditions discussed in the previous chapter, and

Section I. Before the '85 New Wave Movement (Unrest?)

Leading up to the '85 New Wave, the Sixth National Art Exhibition (*Diliujie quanguo meishu zuopin zhanlan*) was the first national showing of Chinese art since the end of the Cultural Revolution, taking place in 1984 at the National Gallery in Beijing. The exhibition was curated under the influence of the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign, so despite avant-garde experimentation and discussion, the selection of art did not live up to the promise of the new era, provoking a widespread backlash against party-sponsored exhibitions.[42] The avant-garde community was rightfully angered by the retrograde political themes and propagandist content and style of the exhibition. Criticism pointed to residual attempts to close the door to the West and blamed the government for backwards thinking. Amid reclaiming creative agency, artists,

[42] Andrews, *The Art of Modern China,* 214.

particularly the young, were once again reminded of the need and desire to definitively move forward by whole-heartedly embracing international (Western) contemporary art.

A year later in fall of 1985, the National Art Museum of China, Beijing, exhibited a survey of Robert Rauschenberg's pop art, mixed-media works as part of his international ROCI project.[43] Rauschenberg was able to rent the museum space (formerly known as the China Art Gallery) because the government had quickly moved "to encourage intellectual freedom and the development of the succeeding generation" following the Sixth National Art Exhibition to make right the artistic error it committed.[44] This exhibition was still government-sponsored but it was a welcome step towards a lighter hand in government censorship. As such, many previously tightly controlled museum spaces could rent out their exhibition space to international artists such as Rauschenberg without much government interference. The exhibition itself coincided in a timely manner with the country's "cultural fever." This was the first influential exhibition of Western art in China to have a profound impact on the artists by inspiring the young generation to experiment with abstraction and mixed-media art. This generation would be of the artists who would thrive during the '85 New Wave and well into their international careers.[45]

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[43] Hiroko Ikegami, "ROCI East: Rauschenberg's Encounters in China," in *East-West Interchanges in American Art: A Long and Tumultuous Relationship* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press, 2011), 180. It was correspondingly named "ROCI China." Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange, or ROCI (pronounced "Rocky"), was a project by Rauschenberg to promote peace and understanding among diverse cultures through his exhibition of works. Taking place between 1985 to 1991, ROCI traveled to the 11 countries of Mexico, Chile, Venezuela, China, Tibet, Japan, Cuba, USSR, Berlin, and Malaysia.
[44] Andrews, *The Art of Modern China,* 215.
[45] Gao, *Total Modernity*, 101.

These two events played definitive shifts in shaping the outlook of the movement moving forward. The Sixth National Art Exhibition's backwards step pushed artists to look to reject the residual academic art remaining from the first half of the decade. "ROCI China" created a foundation upon which the next generation of artists saw the potential of their experimentation and growth with the inspiration of Western art and ideas (which, of course, is rooted in its own patriarchal Western cultural conditions). The '85 New Wave was primed to be an intellectual hotbed of discussions of culture, tradition, modernity, and the meaning of Western theories for Chinese contexts.

Section II. Exhibitions

An exhibition is a temporary selection of artwork that is curated and presented to an audience, traditionally in an official art museum that is a licensed exhibition space. The concept is simple enough; however, the influence an exhibition holds is complex as it is tangible: if curated well and received well, an exhibition has the opportunity to impact significant acclaim onto the artist(s). In order to understand this significance, one must also understand the vital role the museum plays as an institution and a sociopolitical tool.

According to art historian Carol Duncan, "the museum is not the neutral and transparent sheltering space that it is often claimed to be […] it also carries out broad […] political and ideological tasks."[46] Museums are not just bastions of culture, but hallowed

[46] Carol Duncan, "Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship," in Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display eds. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1989), 90.

institutions that affect the perception of both the citizens of a respective nation and the rest of the world.[47] Subsequently, regardless of whatever a viewer's subjective opinions of the artworks are, because the artwork is in the exhibition in the museum, she would inherently understand that the artwork holds a certain objective relevance – that the artwork on display has been chosen to be exhibited over other artworks, giving the artwork implicit superiority over those not exhibited. Thus, by extension of authorship, the artist is imbued with esteem and reputation through her representation at that exhibition.

Ironically, however, in the time leading up to the '85 New Wave, exhibitions had a troublesome political relationship with the avant-garde community. While the gravitas behind what exhibitions represent and bestow held true, the dissatisfaction and negative reaction to the Sixth National Exhibition is a prime example of the avant-garde community turning their backs to the establishment of exhibitions, no longer interested in party-sponsored national exhibitions.[48] Because of the Cultural Revolution's harsh regime and the CCP's vice grip, China developed a "backward exhibition system" where experimental and avant-garde art was often rejected by state-run museums and art schools because of its politically sensitive subject matters. Often, the CCP's Ministry of Culture's control over official national exhibition spaces resulted in the cancellation and early termination of many contemporary art exhibitions because of political avant-garde artworks.[49]

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[47] This sentiment will be further analyzed in Chapter Three, Section One on the Chinese government.
[48] Andrews, *The Art of Modern China,* 214.
[49] Wu Hung, introduction to "Experimental Art Exhibitions and the 2000 Shanghai Biennale" in *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2010), 326.

Though this state infringement and control of exhibitions was by no means unfamiliar (nor does it disappear), these contentious political issues surrounding exhibitions during the years leading up to the movement shifted in 1984. This new generation was aware of their objectives, and the government's control, and the two worked together to move the art world forward. For the next five years of the '85 New Wave, exhibitions develop into the channels of avant-garde Chinese art that lay the foundation for the next decade contemporary Chinese art and exhibitions. Yet, during all of this artistic and sociopolitical change, one can assume that this changing of the guard lacked women. Thus, the question is once again asked: Why was there a lack of representation for women artists?

In the following sections, I present two historically prominent exhibitions: The *China/Avant-garde* exhibition of 1989 and the *Magiciens de la terre* exhibition of 1989. While there is a multitude of exhibitions occurring during this time that each mark their own significant contribution to the time, these two exhibitions each represents a major milestone in contemporary Chinese art, which in turn highlights the lack of women artists and curators represented during milestone exhibitions of the '85 New Wave.

1989, China/Avant-garde Exhibition.

The *China/Avant-garde* exhibition (*Xiandai yishu dazhan*) was the first national exhibition of avant-garde art to articulate the '85 New Wave Movement. It took place on February 5, 1989 at the National Art Museum of China, Beijing, the most prestigious (and hallowed Rauschenberg) exhibition site. The exhibition committee's objective was two-fold: one, to organize the first large-scale and comprehensive survey of all the experimental art happening in China; and two, to confront the government by "taking over official art galleries

through an organized movement."[50] Thus, the objective was political, so the art had to reflect that goal. Logically, art that was not political was not included. But women's art has been set up such that it does not fit this space.

The seminal exhibition was highly anticipated (after three-years in the making), the success of securing the esteemed museum. What *China/Avant-garde* reveals is the tumultuous cultural institution that is a state-controlled museum and setting up an official exhibition, and how such an institution was not a space that thought of women artists as a marginalized group – in fact, women were not even thought of. The ambition to set up exhibitions and to show off the developing contemporary Chinese identity did not include women artists.

Its conception was borne at the first semi-official conference of the '85 New Wave, the Zhuhai '85 New Wave Large-Scale Slide Exhibition (*Zhuhai bawu meishu sichao daxing huandengzhan*). Representatives and critics from avant-garde groups all across China voiced a resounding desire "not only to escape the constraints of the official art world but to begin to replace it."[51] The movement was at its peak and flourishing, and the avant-garde community wanted a legitimate channel via an exhibition to actualize their experimental creations. The conference took place in July 1986 and scholar Gao Minglu (who had also led the conference's organizing committee) began to plan the exhibition, with an ambitious target date of July 1987.

This ambition carried Gao all the way through to April 1987, having secured an exhibition space and artists, when the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the

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[50] Zhou Yan, "Background Material on the *China/Avant-Garde* Exhibition," in *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents*, ed. Wu Hung (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2010), 115.

[51] Andrews, *The Art of Modern China* 221.

CCP ordered Gao and his committee to abort the exhibition due to pressure from yet another conservative political campaign.[52] Though political pressure against anything avant-garde was always anticipated, this termination seemed to register in Gao that in order for a historic national avant-garde exhibition of his ambition to be actualized there would inevitably be compromises – many of which have been criticized as going backwards yet again.

Gao started again from the beginning, and this time his ambitions were even greater: he wanted the exhibition to be held at the National Art Museum of China. Recalling Duncan, who also stated that "To control a museum means precisely to control the representation of a community and its highest values and truths … [and] also the power to define the relative standing of individuals within that community," the National Art Museum of China was (and arguably still is) the nation's biggest symbol of art authority.[53] Gao was perhaps more acutely aware than any other New Wave participant at the time, given his heightened status as "head"[54] (*fuzeren*) of the entire project, of the perfect and perverse juxtaposition that "putting a heretical show in the sacred art palace that it had never been able to enter" would symbolize.[55] The exhibition, if executed successfully, would leave a historic mark on contemporary Chinese art. To say that Gao was under immense pressure to not only deliver on his word but to satisfy his own artistic vision would be an understatement.

A year and a half later, after one rejection due to lingering campaign sentiments, Gao's proposal was accepted by the National Art Museum – under three conditions/compromises

[52] Gao, *Total Modernity* 145. The campaign was the Anti-Bourgeois Liberalism Campaign.
[53] Duncan, "Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship," 8.
[54] The term and title of curator (*cehuaren*) was nonexistent at the time in the Chinese art world.
[55] Gao, *Total Modernity,* 147.

demanded by the Chinese Artists Association (CAA).[56] First, no artwork opposed to the CCP and Four Fundamental Principles[57] (*Sixian jiben yuanze*); second, no artwork that depicted pornographic images, which was interpreted as any representation of sexuality (a Western-influenced concept); and finally, no artwork that was performative, because the authorities wanted to prevent any possibility of a political demonstration.[58] It was difficult for Gao to accept the third condition. Performance art (*xingwei yishu*, which is more literally translated as "behavior art") was perhaps the most experimental and physically direct artistic expression of the individual artist's feelings, especially in a collectivist-minded artistic community. But in a utilitarian fashion to achieve his ambition of exhibiting avant-garde artists and artworks in the National Art Museum of China, Gao compromised and accepted the conditions.

The exhibition committee of fourteen (men), led by Gao, released a public announcement about the exhibition and opened submissions to the entire nation, receiving almost three thousand submissions.[59] However, the issue of funding and the exhibition's budget was at hand. Although the museum space was secured, because the exhibition was unofficial, i.e., not government-sponsored, funding had to come from elsewhere. The exhibition managed to raise 118,600 yuan, which was just over half of the exhibition's planned budget of

[56] The Chinese Artists Association is housed under the Propaganda Department, which is the same state body that cancelled Gao's 1987 exhibition. Refer to Chapter 3, Section1 and Figure 3 for more detail on the CAA and its government ties.
[57] The Four Fundamental Principles are four issues that were not allowed to be debated or maligned. They were as follows: 1) "We must keep to the socialist road;" 2) "We must uphold the dictatorship of the proletariat;" 3) We must uphold the leadership of the Communist Party;" and 4) "We must uphold the Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought."
[58] Gao, *Total Modernity*, 148.
[59] Zhou, "Background Material," 115.

219,050 yuan, and it was enough to open on time.[60] Interestingly to note, Gao recalls that after the initiative taken by Zhang Kangkang, a popular woman writer, wherein she published an article to appeal to her readers. Her article also caught the attention of another famous writer who was able to raise 20,000 yuan.[61] Overall, the exhibition was in a delicate place, skating on thin ice, and there was a feeling that it needed to go well.[62]

Finally, the exhibition opened on February 5, 1989, with the yard of the museum covered in runways of the exhibition's symbol: a no U-turn symbol. Ultimately, the exhibition exhibited 297 artworks by 186 artists. Of the 186 artists selected, only five to six were women artists.[63] Through my research, I was able to uncover Xiao Lu, Shen Yuan, and Huang Yali as three of the five or six women artists that were supposedly present at the exhibition. The standout of the women artists was Xiao Lu.

The exhibition included whichever women artists conformed to the political objective of the exhibition and of the committee's design. So only women artist that did not make an inherently feminine subject were accepted? Shen Yuan's installation piece *Fish Bed* was a water mattress filled with fish. The piece was commentary on capitalism, materialism, and political Chinese society.[64] Xiao Lu's installation *Dialogue* was two appropriated telephone booths.

Xiao's installation is often termed the "pre-Tiananmen" and instills a political connotation. On one hand, this Western/internationalism of seeing Chinese art as "political"

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[60] Gao, *Total Modernity,* 148.
[61] Ibid 152.
[62] Ibid 160.
[63] Interview with Xiao Lu, conducted 12 December 2016.
[64] Shen Yuan, Unpublished essay in *'85 New Wave: The Birth of Chinese Contemporary Art,* ed. by Fei Dawei and Huang Zhuan (Shanghai: Century Publishing Group, 2007), 229.

has led to artists benefiting from making art that exploits this characteristic, as they themselves are exploited in their Western exoticization; however, on the other hand, for creating arguably the most singularly significant event in contemporary Chinese art, Xiao Lu was hardly catapulted into a position of notoriety (for reasons to be discussed in the next chapter).

Gao Minglu's reaction in relation to his records of how difficult putting on the exhibition was and the obstacles he had to overcome. This highly-anticipated exhibition that was slated to display for three weeks, was only exhibited for x amount of days. After working for three years, the exhibition was shut down in the matter of three hours.

Besides, the notorious gun shooting incident, the exhibition (alongside the movement) has received criticism. Li Xianting, who was a part of the organizational committee, criticized China/Avant-garde for being a summarization rather than a proper exhibition.[65] Talk about the criticism against the exhibition, noting how there's a lack of concern for the lack of representation – the care and scrutiny is only on the art, which arguably would be a perfectly fine distinction to have, but the distinction is not even there because women are not even present.

Nevertheless, what holds true is the historical significance of China/Avant-garde and the resonance it had across contemporary Chinese art, China and its politics, and the international art world**.** And it is particularly for this reason that the lack of women artists represented that highlights a troubling pattern in the Chinese art world.

[65] Li Xianting, "Confessions of a China / Avant-garde Curator," in *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents*, ed. Wu Hung (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2010), 117.

1989, Magiciens de la terre Exhibition

Occurring shortly after the China/Avant-garde exhibition, *Magiciens de la terre* was an international survey exhibition that was also the first to present contemporary Chinese art to a Western audience. The exhibition took place in Paris, France, first at the Centre Georges Pompidou and second at the Grande Halle de la Villette, curated by Jean-Hubert Martin. The objective of the exhibition was to bring together approximately fifty contemporary artists from the so-called "centers" of the art world, i.e., the West, and another fifty artists from the purported "margins" of contemporary art. Martin's goal was to bring contemporary art from the peripheries. However, *Magiciens de la terre* is criticized for its Eurocentric trappings. With input from Fei Dawei, another preeminent curator and scholar of contemporary Chinese art, three Chinese artists were selected. The only Chinese artists exhibited were Huang Yong Ping, Gu Dexin, and Yang Jiechang.

What is historically notable about the exhibition is that it occurred a few days after with the Tiananmen Square protests. The political connotations connecting the two gave the Western world a 'forever-political' art label to pigeonhole contemporary Chinese art. In the grand scheme of contemporary Chinese art, *Magiciens* is not included in much scholarship, but its purported objective plays a key role in contemporary Chinese art moving into the international stage, right before the 1990s. I use this exhibition to emphasize the impact of male-dominance on nascent contemporary Chinese art entering the international stage.

"Three issues colored Western reception of Chinese art at the beginning of the 1990s, and endure to this day: first, vestiges of the colonialist search for exoticism in "the other" persisted; second, June 4[, 1989] dominated Western perceptions of China; third, Western art

experts frequently had difficultly seeing beyond the surface appearance of contemporary Chinese art, with the result that they perceived much as derivative. The first two issues have surfaced in exhibitions, and may have been exploited as points of accessibility for the art, particularly in group shows where there is a need for a unifying theme. Critics accused *Magiciens de la Terre*, for example, of fostering the perception of Chinese artists as shamans."[66]

"This Western political propaganda [of favoring Political Pop and Cynical Realism], which has framed Chinese contemporary art as 'other,' is connected to conventional West-centric and colonialist viewpoints."[67] Ai Weiwei provides an interesting juxtaposition to this situation. Though Ai was not a part of the exhibition (as he was already in New York City at the time), as the de facto face of contemporary Chinese art, his hyper-political art is understood to be the exemplar. Though he may come to blows with the Chinese government, he gains popularity and a following and notoriety. As they say, there is no such thing as bad publicity. Whereas with women artists, there is no publicity; there is no mentioning whatsoever.

I argue that *Magiciens de la terre* set a precedence for contemporary Chinese art to be a certain way to the international art world, to the west. Art made by women artists did not fit that political leaning, male mold. As contemporary Chinese art globalized, art museums and collectors favored art that resonated with what was understood as "contemporary Chinese art": political in message and male in design. The exhibition represents the beginning of the

[66] Britta Erickson, "The Reception in the West of Experimental Mainland Chinese Art of the 1990s," in *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents,* ed. Wu Hung (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2010), 358.
[67] Ibid 365.

problematic reception of contemporary Chinese art in a Eurocentric world. It also lends itself to reinforcing the toxic pattern that the male experience is the universal experience.

Section III. Scholarship

The exciting thing about scholarship written about the '85 New Wave is that there is no real immediate lack of it: there are pages upon pages of primary documents of letters between artists, letters between critics, exhibition materials, art magazines. Many relevant players from this period are still alive and producing work, both academic and artistic. The collision of Chinese and Western cultures resulted in the wealth of texts (essays, reviews, catalogues) and images (artworks, photographs) by artists, scholars, and critics that are studied today to understand the movement, because "it not only seemed necessary, but also very natural to artists and art critics to create documents of the artistic movement."[68] Nevertheless, like all history, different accounts reveal discontinuities and minute incongruities in records.

There is an acknowledgement that there is a lack of scholarship and presence of women artists during this time, however, my impression from research and interviews is that the initiative to act against this lack of representation is lackluster, and has even run into the ground. While men scholars acknowledge the lack of women artists, they hardly ever attempt to pursue any reasons why there is a lack of representation. They justify the lack of representation as a product of the time, and as such has brought me to this thesis project.

[68] Martina Köppel-Yang, "A Nationwide Forum and Model: Art Magazines and Symposia," in *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents,* edited by Wu Hung (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2010), 46

For this project, I only covered scholarship in English. Partially due to my lack of academic fluency in Mandarin Chinese, but also to "[draw] attention to how language and discrepant flows of translation influence situated knowledge about a subject," like Chinese women artists.[69] I rely on the translations given by primary participants and completed by other scholars.[70] However, because of this, I have not been able to read magazines, which were incredibly vital in the development of contemporary Chinese art. Magazines were important means of intellectual discussion in the Chinese art world, especially during a developing time as the '85 New Wave. The only exception is reading the transcripts of interviews conducted by Asia Art Archive; the dialogue is colloquial.

Yet again, for all the scholarship covering modern and contemporary Chinese art, what becomes apparent is the distinct lack of women artists in these discussions. Perhaps, from a sociocultural perspective, this female marginalization is not surprising given China's patriarchal society, but from a historical standpoint even the lack of discussing that this lack of representation for women artists, during this period of extreme change and many players, is both troubling and indicative of a larger global and institutional problem.

Most scholarship about the '85 New Wave is written by Chinese scholars. There is an "assumption that becoming Western is better, presumes that there is only one viable institutional and cultural mode of being in the modern world, and denies the possibility of

[69] Esther Ngan-Ling Chow, Naihua Zhang, and Jinling Wang, "Promising and Contested Fields: Women's Studies and Sociology of Women/Gender in Contemporary China." *Gender and Society* 18 (2004): 165.
[70] Another interesting venue of research would be to see how Chinese scholarship is translated into English. Whether there is any government input.

multiple and alternative modes of modernity and economy."[71] Perhaps scholars are "not recognizing deep indigenous social forces that could distort the foreign ideas or in destroying traditional forces that deserved to be preserved as important components of modernity, the careful analysis of institutional, cultural and historical specificities of China is crucial for understanding China's new foray into global capitalism, and not repeating the mistakes and tragedies of imposing Western solutions in the past."[72]

In the introduction of his remarkable retrospective of twentieth-century Chinese art, Gao Minglu, one of the preeminent scholars and direct participants in the '85 New Wave, addresses the issue of women artists during the movement saying,

> In the 1980s, a decade marked by activism and enthusiasm for the pursuit of modernity and of ideological liberation, female artists became involved in the '85 Movement. Their emergence, however, was not catalyzed by feminism. Rather their concepts and ideals paralleled those of their male colleagues. Furthermore, their work appeared to take on what some consider stereotypically masculine qualities.[73]

Two points stand out: a refute against feminism and the association with male colleagues in concepts and ideals. This shows both a contrast with the return to domesticity post-Mao, as well as an interesting glimpse into women artists acknowledging a need to familiarize themselves to the male-norm in the art world. Moreover, another contrast is with academic interest in the 1980s emphasizing gender differences.

Gao also said, "During '85 New Wave, including women artists, no one brought up the concept of 'Women's Art.' At that time, people sought for commonality, and not the issues of

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[71] Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, "The Resilience of Guanxi and Its New Deployments: A Critique of Some New Guanxi Scholarship." *The China Quarterly* 170 (2002): 472.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Gao, *Total Modernity,* 23.

'marginal groups.'"[74] Once again, women are marginalized for a 'greater good,' similar to the ideology underpinning the Cultural Revolution.

Unsurprisingly, there is a parallel lack of women's voices in scholarship. In my research, the only critique I found on the male-dominated exhibition process is scholar Xu Hong's "Walking Out of the Abyss: My Feminist Critique." Xu describes the reality of in the way exhibitions are organized in China:

> A group of men sit around and discuss what artwork by which female artist is up to their standards for participation, or which aren't. In the end, they choose a work by the female artist who most closely abides by their standards and tastes, then they attach their preposterous critique to the artwork. […] In fact, such a coarse attitude in the treatment of female artists is an extension of a longstanding patriarchy.[75]

Though her article was published in 1994, which aligns historically with the phenomena of women 'emerging' in the 1990s, Xu's biting critique reveals the "continuation of obsolete and sexist traditions" that extended from the 1980s, though not written about.

Liao Wen is one of few Chinese women critics cited. "Women's Approach indicates how women artists perceive the world and express their feelings in artistic forms different from men because of their social gender, the way society has shaped them, not because of biological differences." So indeed, the differences between man and woman artist lies in socially constructed cultural conditions.

In the only section of his comprehensive history book surveying contemporary Chinese art Wu directly addresses women artists in a section titled "Women Experimentalists." He

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[74] Gao Minglu, *The wall: Reshaping contemporary Chinese art* (Buffalo, NY: Albright Knox Art Gallery, 2005), 252.
[75] Xu Hong, "Walking Out of the Abyss: My Feminist Critique," in *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents*, ed. Wu Hung (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2010), 193.

begins with the following to introduce (for the entirety of 456 pages) six contemporary women artists:[76]

> To commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the '85 Art New Wave, Gao Minglu and Fei Dawei each complied a historical archive of the avant-garde movement, organizing data on important artists and groups. Among the pivotal figures who are given individual entries, there is not a single woman; the leaders and representative of the various regional groups are likewise all male artists. The glaring absence of women in this body of documents invites once again the question posed by Linda Nochlin in 1971: why has greatness in artistic accomplishment only been reserves for male geniuses? But if the two archives, which contain numerous uncensored writings by artists active from the mid- to late-1980s, indeed reflect the general situation of avant-garde Chinese art at the time, then what they represent seems a ground zero, against which one can measure the growing roles played by women in contemporary Chinese art in the 1990s.[77]

Wu references Nochlin's great question in attempts to defend the lack of representation of women artists in such a way that seems he instead wishes to subvert it – by not denying the existence of great Chinese women artists but simply justifying the case that those women artists were not present in the 1980s because they emerged a decade later – which only serves to ironically reemphasize Nochlin's conclusion: that to even pose the question (moreover, even attempt to justify it) "falsifies the nature of the issue at the same time that it insidiously supplies its own answer: 'There are no great women artists because women are incapable of greatness.'"[78] Wu's attempt to defend Gao and Fei's disappointing historical archives lends itself to highlighting a problematic and insistent reoccurrence in contemporary Chinese art

[76] Cai Jin, Xing Danwen, Yin Xiuwen, Lin Tianmiao, Chen Linyang, and Peng Yu.
[77] Wu Hung, ed. *Contemporary Chinese Art: A History (1970s-2000s)* (New York: Thames & Hudson, Inc., 2014), 222.
[78] Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" 158.

where an (male) authority figure makes such a claim defending the lack of representation of women artists.

Moreover, the six women artists Wu talked about, he named them "experimentalists."[79] The term itself in Wu's own definition indicates progress; however, he does not do much more exploration of women experimentalists beyond linking them too their sex. Wu is quick to reject popular terms like "unofficial art" and "avant-garde" because they exaggerate political and radical inclinations, respectively. Since women artists are, by Wu's definition, "experimental" then why is there still a lack of coverage? If women artists never fit into these 1980s categories, then why has there not been a greater initiative to cover this 'category' of experimental (women) artists? It is one thing to create and (hyper-)articulate the gender dichotomy and then create scholarship about it to explore its nuances beyond the initial dichotic categorization to better understand it. It is another thing when this dichotomy is created and then used to denigrate and discriminate against women artists because of their gender – one that is indicative of the systemic exclusion of women artists.

These (male) scholars do their best to illuminate women artists, but when it seems that when the idea of a separate woman identity emerges – one that strays from the male standard

[79] In Wu's words once again"…experimental art is not associated with any particular artistic style, subject matter, or political orientation, but is defined by its relationship with four other major traditions in contemporary Chinese art, namely, (1) a highly politicized official art directly under the sponsorship of the party, (2) an academic art that struggles to separate itself from political propaganda by emphasizing technical training and higher aesthetic standards, (3) a popular urban visual culture that eagerly absorbs fashionable images from Hong Kong, Japan, and the West, and (4) an 'international' commercial art, that, though often initially part of experimental art, eventually caters to an international art market." Wu Hung, *Exhibiting Experimental Art in China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 11.

– they are quick to divest the burden of more research, hyper-articulating the gendered differences between men and women artists and ending discussion there.

What is also lacking from the scholarship narrative is a female voice. Scholarship covering the movement is once again dominated by men scholars. In my research, I came across the woman scholar, Liao Wen. An interesting point is *Contemporary Chinese Art Criticism Series: A Study on Women's Art in China* is a book by Liao Wen, that has not been translated.[80]

Section IV. Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, this chapter highlights the lack of representation of women artists in exhibitions and scholarship during the ’85 New Wave. I have argued that the lack of women artists in these two milestone exhibitions in the ’85 New Wave and the resulting lack in scholarship sets a clear precedence for women artists lacking a presence in developing contemporary Chinese art.

The lack of women artists in both milestone exhibitions set another precedence for women artists to remain in the periphery. Without women artists in *China/Avant-garde*, there is a lack of women in the developing discourse of contemporary Chinese art, women are not gaining any space; in *Magiciens de la terre*, the lack of women artists impresses upon the international stage that contemporary Chinese art is best represented by men artists.

The point of this chapter is to show how the lack of female representation plays into Wu Hung’s quote that perhaps the lack of women artists during this time was just to be a ground

[80] Once again, investigating the process behind how Chinese texts are translated into English could provide another interesting facet of argument.

zero for women in the 1990s. On one hand, perhaps it seems easier to accept that women artists were not active during the mid- to late-1980s. But then on the other hand, you have the few women artists who peek through in exhibitions and scholarship – what is their story? How did they manage to be represented when other women artists were not? And if they could slip onto the scene, where were the other women artists? Why were other women artists not present? Why has there not been a greater initiative to research and archive women artists?

Chapter 3. Cultural Conditions, post-'85 New Wave Movement

This chapter will focus on cultural conditions that have since shaped the development of contemporary Chinese art after the '85 New Wave, specifically looking at the role of the government. While it is not that these conditions were not present before or during the movement, but rather the globalization of contemporary Chinese art has articulated a space to analyze and critique these conditions.

Section 1. Government

Given the rapid globalization of contemporary Chinese art in the past two decades, the Chinese government has truly stepped into a position of cultural authority. In China, one cannot expect to affect anything without the support of the government. The chart below (fig. 2) illustrates the clear hierarchy of a selection of arts organizations in China.

To recall, art historian Carol Duncan commented on the way museums serve as ideological tools to influence the perceptions a community. Art museums in China are used as tools by the government not only to impress upon its citizens but onto international audiences.[81] The CCP continues to maintain a direct and omnipresent control over the art world, and over China's cultural scene.[82] The CCP wants to continue the traditional Chinese view on art and aesthetics to generate 'good' and 'beautiful' outcomes for the nation; it wants

[81] Mariza Varutti, *Museums in China: The Politics of Representation after Mao* (England: Boydell & Brewer, 2014), 78-79.
[82] Keane, *Creative Industries in China*, 17.

to return to upholding the principle Confucian harmony. Thus, the potential for critical protests to arise from within the art world is never far from the CCP's minds.[83]

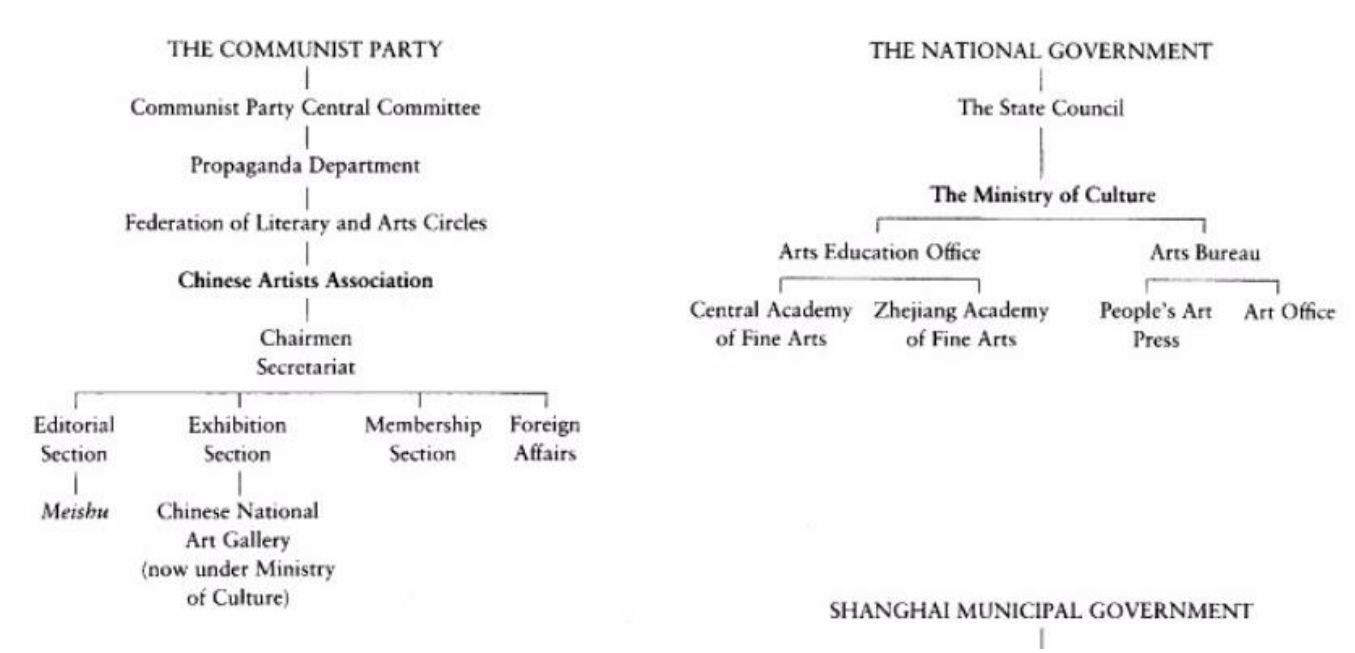

Figure 2. China's Arts Bureaucracy (selected organizations only).

Though the government has reduced much of its superficial control over museums, it remains a key orchestrator in the ongoing development of museums.[84] Even if it seems like the government allows non-state entities to operate separate from their direct orders, the state still has the final say in every regard, from curation to traveling exhibitions.[85] if one expects to do anything in China, one needs the government's approval in some form, whether directly or indirectly, at some stage. The government also wants to project the best face forward; women are not a part of that image. And again, I do not necessarily think that the Chinese government

[83] Ibid 52.
[84] Varutti, "*Museums in China,* 159.
[85] Ibid.

does not want women in positions of power, but given China's patriarchal society, women are not allotted spaces to become powerful people.

Moreover, art has since become a prominent form of soft power for the government. As China readied itself to become a serious player on the international stage, the CCP was carefully calibrating the cultural production of the Chinese brand, via art, with its global economic development. Practically, in modern China, this soft power translates into a full-scale public relations campaign designed to bolster its image – and influence – by selling the best, most-profitable version of itself to the world through art. "One should not forget that these 'Political Pop' or 'Cynical Realist' artists have benefited from the present market economy to enrich themselves and they have rarely been banned. A new situation appearing in the country is a social compromise between official political power and intellectual claims for freedom, enacted by replacing ideological conflicts with materialist values."[86]

Even if the art may be political, so long as the artist does not defy the state there will not be any repercussions. The prominence of artists critical of the government and Mao suggests an unofficial reconciliation with "a dark recent history and an openness to quiet forms of dissent. "Of course, Ai Weiwei comes to mind. Ever so the globe's popular Chinese dissident, Ai has had more than his fair share of political consequences for his critical art. In Evan Osnos' *Age of Ambition,* Osnos interviewed fellow artist Xu Bing about Xu's thoughts on Ai's political activities. Xu said, "Not everyone can be like Ai Weiwei, because then China wouldn't be able to

[86] Hou Hanru, "Entropy, Chinese Artists, Western Art Institutions: A New Internationalism," in *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents,* ed. Wu Hung (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2010), 364.

develop, right? But if China doesn't permit a man like Ai Weiwei, well, then it has a problem."[87] This quote very clearly encompasses the delicate line that artists walk in China when facing the government.

The government plays a key role in scaffolding the entirety of the creative industry (via *guanxi*, discussed in the following section). Though there have been recent efforts to minimize government involvement, the government maintain the authority to "approve projects, allocate resources [i.e., exhibition space], and distribute finances [i.e., funding]."[88] "The Chinese government plans to concentrate on a limited number of museums, selected for their importance in representing the Chinese nation (over which the government wishes to maintain control) while 'specialised' [sic] museums will be the domain of other actors, primarily state-owned enterprises and private individuals."[89] Even though 'specialized' museums would be in the domain of other non-governmental actors, those actors still remain within the domain of the government. State-owned enterprises rely on funding from the state to function, thus their system is a disguised state monopoly. Moreover, private individuals do not and cannot expect to operate on any level without connections to the government.

"Similarly, in 2006, the Ministry of Culture issued guidelines on Management Methodology in Museums, specifying that the 'nation will aid and develop the museum business and will encourage personal, legal and other organizations to set up museums'."[90]

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[87] Evan Osnos, *Age of Ambition: Chasing Fortune, Truth, and Faith in New China* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015,) 191.
[88] Ying Fan, "'Guanxi', government and corporate reputation in China: Lessons for international companies." *Marketing Intelligence & Planning* 25 (2007): 504.
[89] Varutti, *Museums in China*, 45.
[90] Ibid 48.

Though this instance is outside of the '85 New Wave, it echoes the government's stake hold and hand in the museum industry, and hints at how the government can also take such aid away. The government therefore plays an omnipresent role in determining which artists are allowed into the scene and can represent China on the international stage – a stage that do not necessarily want women representing China.

The connections between people, and for this project specifically the connections between people in the creative industry of the art world. The crux is that these creative industries have not been created with women in mind, and again because women did not 'emerge' until the 1990s, the industry had already developed and formed much without women in mind, or rather without allotting a female/female-friendly space.

Section 2. Guanxi

From the convergence of the government and art emerges the concept of *guanxi*. The most confining thing about *guanxi* is that, because the Chinese do not publicly admit to the practice, there is difficultly recording such 'transactions.' Underlying all of this is the Chinese concept of *guanxi*, which roughly translated is the social mores of "connections" or "a relationship." "As most Chinese people are aware, *guanxixue* is something that most people practice, to varying degrees of effectiveness and artistry, but few people would admit to it publicly. There is *guanxixue's* association in public discourse with the grey areas between proper and improper behavior and with getting around rules and regulations."[91] However,

[91] Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, "The Resilience of Guanxi and Its New Deployments: A Critique of Some New Guanxi Scholarship." *The China Quarterly* 170 (2002): 461.

"*Guanxi* places much more emphasis on *renqing* and the long-term obligations and bond of the relationship than the material interest exchanged, whereas in bribery and corruption, the social relationship is a means, not an end, of the exchange."[92]

In Mayfair Mei-hui Wang's *Gifts, Favors and Banquets: The Art of Social Relationships in China*, she explicitly states that though "impersonal money has begun to replace some of the affectively charged relationships created by gifts and reciprocal favors,"[93] *guanxiexue* has also "found new territory to colonize."[94] This new territory, I argue, can be found in the Chinese art world. "In the commercializing economy of the 1980s and early 1990s, [Yang] found that just as old contexts of *guanxi* usage declined, new ones emerged, such as the reliance on *guanxixue* to locate and maintain supply sources for new commercial ventures."[95] Once again, this aligns with the globalization of contemporary Chinese art in the 1990s where money talks and buys exhibition spots and reviews.[96]

We can see the prevailing "cognitive patterns" of Chinese people are dominated by "customary thinking," which "manifests in decision making and action" when one obeys higher powers or personal relationship – *guanxi* – instead of equality.[97] *Guanxi* is social capital that either supports or constraints representation in the Chinese art world. While this social symbiosis and in-group behavior is not confined to China, and thus necessitating that one be

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[92] Ibid 465.
[93] Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, *Gifts, Favors and Banquets*: *The Art of Social Relationships in China* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1994), 171.
[94] Ibid 167.
[95] Yang, "The Resilience of Guanxi and its New Deployments," 463.
[96] Interview with Xiao Lu, December 2016.
[97] Marina Zhang, *China 2.0.: The Transformation of an Emerging Superpower? And the New Opportunities* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2010), 40.

mindful of generalizing, the validation and support from *gunaxi*-cultivated relationships increases one's chances to remain relevant in the Chinese art world.

Historical studies of innovation internationally have shown that social contexts are important in both generating and validating ideas. Often described as the strength of weak ties thesis, the argument is that weak ties among actors are more likely to result in the generation of creative ideas; that is, they are more likely to provide unique insights and novel innovation than strong ties. However, when it comes to the "validation" of ideas, the support of influential others, often a leader (*lingdao*), is important – that is, "ideas can profit from political aid and sponsorship provided through strong network ties." [98] Therefore, the key factor that plays a role in gaining sociopolitical capital in China is *guanxi*.

Another interesting factor to pursue would be the institution of marriage in relation to *guanxi.* For all intents and purposes, marriage is manifestation of the male and female relationships. Idea of face – a wife needs to save face for her husband. Marriage is an interesting form of *guanxi*; a foot in the door, of sorts. I do not deny the abilities or fame of these women artists who are married, but couples have come in pairs for a long time. Lin Tianmiao and her husband. Yin Xiuzhen and her husband. Both couple pairs rose to prominence during Apartment Art.[99] Chen Aikang even joked that she was hired because her husband was already at the academy. Marriage plays a double-edged sword: women cannot let their husbands lose face by stepping out of line and being a 'feminist.'

[98] Keane, *Creative Industries in China,* 106.
[99] A 1990s art movement that is characterized by artist couples curating exhibitions in their own homes, usually apartments, hence the name.

Section 3. Feminism

Contemporary China is defined by growth, the question is: are women hungry for change? Are women ravenous? However, have women been oppressed from being ravenous; do women want growth? Have the women who have sought growth been suppressed? Of all the cultural conditions in this thesis, feminism poses the potential to be the singular most disruptive force in contemporary Chinese art. Simply put, feminism is equality of the sexes. Women's art holds feminine subject matters and materials, which can be understood as both a construct and a reality.

Imposition of western feminism and its conflict with the issue of human rights in China mixed with the failed women's liberation; many Chinese women (artists) have difficulty accepting the feminist handle. The terms feminist and feminism connote strong sociopolitical leanings. Once again, because China is a patriarchal society, for a woman artists to declare herself as a feminist means stepping out of state line and risking negatively affecting one's husband if married.

The return to domesticity after the Cultural Revolution and rediscovery of femininity is the basis of separation and discrimination of women artists. Women artists are not making highly political art (or at least, there is not much documentation of such). And I think what you can glean from this recession back into the domestic sphere and the women artists who emerged from this time is 'feminist' women artists who do not align themselves with the label because of the looming feminist epoch mantle that they would take on, and the sociopolitical repercussions that such may incur upon themselves otherwise.

Women are no perhaps overtly confronting feminist issues, but their entire existence given China's cultural conditions is a confrontation of the feminist issue. As a result, artists like Lin Tianmiao reject the label; artists like Xiao Lu and Zhen Guo do not necessarily accept or reject the label, but rather prefer to remain vague because they themselves do not know how to accept the label, or reconcile the historical/social dissonance that comes with not having a feminist wave and/or rejecting the imposition of Western feminism. Then in comparison to the younger, post-Cultural Revolution, 1970s women artists, they are more readily excepting the feminist label, or at least the feminine subject matter. What has occurred is problem of women's unintentional-intentional complicity with patriarchal systems that exploit them. Since women have been relegated to the disadvantaged position of the "other," subjugated by both patriarchal and internal forms of marginalization.[100]

[100] Phyllis Hwee Leng Teo, "Alternative Agency in Representation by Contemporary Chinese Women Artists," 4.

Figure 3. Xiao Lu shooting her installation *Dialogue* (1989).

Chapter 4. Xiao Lu

There are but a handful of contemporary Chinese women artists who have broken through onto the international stage.[101] Xiao Lu is one of those women artists. With a career starting in the '85 New Wave Movement and spanning over twenty-nine years, Xiao is undeniably one of the most well-known Chinese woman artists alive today. Her international recognition comes from her evolution from oil painter to performance artist in 1989 at the *China/Avant-garde* exhibition with her infamous installation-cum-performance piece *Dialogue*. She fired two bullets into her artwork with a borrowed gun, single-handedly shutting down the national exhibition on its opening day. *Dialogue* cemented Xiao in history.

Yet, relative to her male counterparts, Xiao's representation and success is relatively miniscule. Moreover, what one finds in researching Xiao and *Dialogue* is the attachment of another (man) artist: Tang Song, a bystander who was detained in the aftermath of the "gunshot incident" (*qiangji shijian*). From the immediate news coverage that followed the gunshot incident to scholarship published within the last seven years, *Dialogue* is interpreted as being co-authored by both Xiao and Tang, often with Tang's name appearing before Xiao's. This false co-ownership, however, was not met with denial or reclamation; in fact, Xiao accepted this partnership in the process of entering a nine-year relationship with Tang. For those nine years, she was content to share ownership of *Dialogue* – until the time came to reclaim ownership and she was met with controversy and vilification.

[101] For others, see: Lin Tianmiao, He Chengyao, Li Shuang.

I focus on *Dialogue* because I believe the work has much to offer as a heuristic for reflecting upon the state of Chinese women artists in contemporary Chinese art, and contemporary China discourse. It provides an occasion for bringing into focus the cultural conditions that this project describes and ground them by showing how they are encompassed in Xiao and her resulting lack of representation.

Section 1. An Emotional Woman

Xiao Lu was born in 1962 in Hangzhou, China. She graduated from the High School of Fine Art, Beijing in 1984 and from the Oil Painting Department at the distinguished Zhejiang Academy of Fine Art (now known as the China Academy of Art) in 1988. The eldest daughter to two well-respected Soviet Realism art professors of the Zhejiang Fine Arts Academy (now known as the China Academy of Art) in Hangzhou, Xiao grew up wealthy and more privileged than many artists of the time. Although her life of privilege emboldened her in many ways, at times childishly rebelling against her parents or asserting airs around her peers, Xiao admits she was also sheltered by her parents, and thus naïve about a great many things. The most significant of which is romance – and by extension, her emotions.[102]

Xiao's naivety about romance was quickly disillusioned by two life events that significantly affected her emotional state of being and her artistic career. The first is her failed adolescent love and the second is when she was sexually assaulted by a trusted family friend.

[102] Xiao Lu, *Dialogue*, trans. Archibald McKenzie (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), 22. Interview with Xiao Lu, December 2016.

Her relationship with a childhood friend was marked by innocence and ended with realization; her sexual assault was marked by naivety and resulted in emotional trauma.

Section 2. A (Non-)Political Woman

In 1988, when she needed to create a final artwork for graduation, she was moved to create something besides an oil painting. She received much pushback from the academy's board, but Xiao preserved and sought out aid to help her construct her installation. Thus, *Dialogue* was born.

Dialogue is the coupling of two appropriated telephone booths. The booths sit on opposite ends of a rectangular base of stone tiles, with an extension of tiles bisecting the base and extending out towards the viewer. In the booth on the left, one sees the back of a woman; in the booth on the right, the back of a man. Between the two booths, there is a mirrored back wall that is sectioned off with red tape cross, and a thin pedestal rises in front of the mirror where a red receiver sits with its telephone dangling towards the ground. Both figures are larger than life but the feeling of imposition or intimidation that is typically drawn from larger than life figures is ameliorated by their backs facing the viewer. Both woman and man have a telephone to their right ear, leading the viewer to assume a conversation between the two. Yet the empty receiver between the two booths suggests the cliché disconnect between a woman and man that perhaps they are talking to each other, but they are not hearing what the other person is saying.

Dialogue can be understood as a manifestation of Xiao's inner turmoil from both seminal moments of her emotional development. The disconnected telephone recalls how

Xiao's sexual assaulter never picked up the phone or returned her calls after being confronted.[103] *Dialogue* is a decidedly emotional and personal piece. There has been a (mis)interpretation of *Dialogue*'s meaning and Tang's immediately assumed co-ownership of the artwork highlights the gendered crux of Xiao's marginalized career. It also lends itself to revealing entrenched Chinese cultural values that belay all (mis)interpretations of Chinese Women's Art and how women artists are perceived, particularly by a primarily male audience.

Section 3. A Silent Woman

After the shooting incident, Xiao is primarily known for her gunshots. Arguably, considering how she was received after, the gunshots have been made into something more important than Xiao herself. During a time when the Chinese government did not (and still does not) allow citizens to own guns, it is understandable that Xiao's actions would have the response it did. Yet what followed the gunshots is perhaps the most damning indication of this entire thesis: for fifteen years, Dialogue was owned not only by Xiao, but by Tang; they were assumed to be co-conspirators.

At *China/Avant-garde*, Xiao shot the gun at her installation and Tang, who was standing nearby, was taken in custody. Xiao, in her emotionally immature state, was quick to turn herself into authorities.[104] to allow Tang to take co-ownership of Dialogue. In the commotion of the

[103] Xiao Lu, *Dialogue,* 61.
[104] Both Xiao and Tang were released without a trial because of her's and Tang's fathers' positions in society: Xiao's father Zhejiang's former headmaster and Tang's father a retired soldier from a respected cadre.

shooting and after Xiao and Tang were released from prison, Tang gave Gao Minglu a joint statement that read:

> As parties to the shooting incident on the day of the opening of the "China/Avant-Garde" exhibition, we consider it a purely artistic incident. We consider that in art, there may be artists with different understandings of society, but as artists we are not interested in politics. We are interested in the values of art as such and in its social value, and in using the right form with which to create, in order to carry out the process of deepening that understanding.
> – Xiao Lu, Tang Song[105]

In her book, Xiao reveals that Tang was insistent to release a statement and Xiao allowed him to write one up for public release. Tang, she thought, was much more in-tune with the political and intellectual wherewithal of the movement. Their joint statement played well with the impetus to provide aesthetic justification for Xiao's performance given the political climate of the time.

Xiao decided that for 'love' she was fine with the co-authorship. Many peers of her peers, however, could not understand how Tang, who was a student of the Traditional Chinese Painting department at Zhejiang, could possibly have any ownership over *Dialogue.* Nevertheless, the couple left China to live in Australia for the next eight years until 1997. During this time, Xiao was reclusive and produced little work, but she was in love and for her that was enough.

> I am not good at logical Arguments and explanations, and cannot begin to discourse about art, I only know how to live truthfully. As a piece of work, its presentation is to me a form of meeting my own emotional needs. It can be a painting or a poem, or even to say that it needs a gun […], all of this is determined by my own psychological conditions

[105] Gao, *Total Modernity,* 161.

> and pathways. It cannot be explained in terms of 'art'; it is a form of survival instinct, the very locus of life.[106]

Xiao's thoughts reflect much of the same sentiments many women artists share, being confused or unsure of themselves.[107] Granted she chose to escape from China to Australia because of China's anti-gun laws, but also the nature of her gender/sex impeded her ownership. Furthermore, in a recent interview in 2014, Xiao reiterates that "When [she] made Dialogue in 1989, [she] was extremely immature. Now [she] had too much of a reputation, but [she] didn't know how to keep producing work […] [she] felt if a man was able to give [her] love, maybe [she] didn't need art anymore."[108] She was complicit to the systems that exploited her.

Section 4. A Spiteful Woman?

Xiao and Tang's relationship eventually came to a tumultuous end. Xiao worked to reclaim *Dialogue* in three steps. In 2003, Xiao raised a gun once more – this time at herself – and fired fifteen shots, creating *Fifteen Gunshots…from 1989 to 2003*. This work was simultaneously Xiao bookending that emotional fifteen-year chapter of her life and reclaiming *Dialogue*.[109] The work is fifteen black and white photographs of Xiao dressed in black, standing in front of a brick wall, holding a gun pointed at the viewer. There are two distinct features of

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[106] Xiao Lu, quoted in Adele Tan, "Elusive Disclosures, Shooting Desire. Xiao Lu and the Missing Sex of Post-89 Performance Art in China," ed. Birgit Hofener, Franziska, Jeong-hee Lee-Kalisch, and Juliane Noth (Weimar: Verlag und Datenbank für Geisteswissenschaften, 2012), 133. Tan's translation.
[107] For more, refer to AAA interviews from Chapter 1, Section 1.
[108] Philip Wen, "25 years on, artist remembers 'first gunshots of Tiananmen,'" *Sydney Morning Herald,* May 30, 2014.
[109] Xiao, *Dialogue*.

the work: from left to right, each photograph of becomes progressively lighter, until her image is barely visible; and each photograph bares a single gunshot, a testament to *Dialogue.* She is both commemorating the fifteenth 'anniversary' of *Dialogue* and reconciling her emotional trauma, now containing double the emotional burden, freeing herself from the political misinterpretation.

Figure 4. Xiao Lu, *Fifteen Gunshots…from 1989 to 2003* (2003).

In 2004, Xiao participated in the first Dashanzi International Art Festival (DIAF) in the famed 798 Art District in Beijing. For the festival, she reinstalled *Dialogue* alongside *Fifteen Gunshots.* As part of her performance, she read a statement aloud:

> 15 years ago, the National Gallery was shut after I fired two shots at the China Avant-Garde exhibition.
> 15 years ago, in the moment that I raised the pistol and Tang Song yelled out "Fire!" he was embroiled into this incident started by gunshot sounds.
> 15 years ago, when I did not know how to explain the facts about what happened after the shots rang out, Tang Song became the spokesperson of the work.
> 15 years ago, when I was 'knocked out' by that gunshot, 'love' somehow came to my side.
> For 15 years, I have not said a work about this piece of work.
> For 15 years, I believed that the best experience gained in the *Pistol-shot event* was that of having 'feelings.'
> Today after 15 years, I am finally saying what I wat to say as an author.
> Today after 15 years, I finally dare to face up to the truth.
> Today after 15 years, I let my most beloved hair be presented along with the truth to everyone in the audience.[110]

[110] Xiao Lu, quoted in Tan, "Elusive Disclosures, Shooting Desire," 131. Tan's translation.

Afterwards she cut off sections of her hair and disseminated it to audience members with handouts of her statement and further explanation of her performance and the truth behind *Dialogue*.[111] For Xiao, her hair had always been a prized feature; moreover, she amassed much of her hair during her relationship with Tang. [112] The act of cutting her hair was two-fold: a token of sincerity to audience members, wherein her hair is a representation of herself; and gave herself an intimate catharsis that juxtaposed the violent release of the gunshot incident.

Figure 5. Xiao Lu readying her hair to be cut, scissors lying to her right (2004).

In 2010, after corresponding with support from Gao and receiving his support,[113] Xiao published her thinly-veiled autobiography, eponymously named *Dialogue*. This fictional retelling of Xiao's life reveals the events behind her fifteen-year silence. When Xiao and Tang

[111] Tan, "Elusive Disclosures, Shooting Desire," 131.
[112] Interview with Xiao Lu, December 2016.
[113] Gao Minglu, foreword to *Dialogue*, by Xiao Lu (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), x-xi.

ended their relationship, Xiao realized she wanted to rightfully reclaim sole ownership of *Dialogue*. Xiao was encouraged by friends and colleagues to speak up about the truth behind the incident; however, whenever *Dialogue* was published, no one believed her. Instead, many artists, men and women alike, believed her to be a vindictive and jilted lover rather than the political heroine they previously painted.

Section 5. A Woman, an Artist

Today, Xiao lives about a half-hour taxi ride out of Beijing in her studio-cum-house that she designed herself. In December 2016, I traveled to Beijing and interviewed Xiao at her residence.[114] In the earliest stages of my research, I stumbled upon Xiao's website.[115] The website itself is rather rudimentary, with some bugs (as she manages it by herself), but it is filled with many resources (images, interviews, criticism) that she has collected over the years. However, what caught my eye was the contact page: while most artist websites have a conventional email address for contact, Xiao's website provided an email address, her personal cellphone number, her WeChat ID code, and your typical blank contact form.[116] The voluntary offering of this information was my first point of contact with Xiao, and what I later learned, her open and vulnerable character. I emailed Xiao on a whim informing that I would be traveling to Beijing and would be interested in meeting with her; three days later I received a response inviting me to her residence.

[114] In part, thanks to the Plan II Honors Program for their Thesis Travel Grant.
[115] For more, see: xiaoluart.com.
[116] The website has since changed, and no longer has this option.

In our interview, Xiao recalled that a male colleague at the time of her return from Australia encouraged her to continue making art that dealt with guns, as to maintain relevance in the (Chinese) art world. Again, the favoritism for political subject matters in China is a clearly a male-driven standard, maintained by the impetus to maintain one's standing. However, Xiao said that *Dialogue* was never about the gun or the politics surrounding and combatting authority. For Xiao, she said that her performance's focus and her intention was the act of shooting the gun and the catharsis that came from the release. She had wanted to disrupt the knot of emotions within her and firing a gun was her way of doing so, separate of any explicit political motivations.

I do not want to give any false impression that Xiao is the exemplar for Chinese women artists; she is in many ways quite the opposite. Nevertheless, her experiences reveal underlying sexist facets of contemporary Chinese art. The historical interpretation of her "gunshot incident" is revealed to have been too hastily concluded due to the heightened political climate of the time of the performance, becoming ossified and monolithic in the process.[117] Though the gunshot incident catapulted Xiao into international renown, and for reasons that align only with the Chinese art world's standards, and into a patriarchal space that was not willing to receive her under any other reason.

[117] Tan, "Elusive Disclosures, Shooting Desire," 127.

Conclusion

On the surface, these sociopolitical factors will endure, such that the issue of representation is difficult to change. Though the cultural conditions I have outlined are not unique to China alone, as most women artists face this universal lack of representation, these cultural conditions are perhaps more exacerbated in China. My hopes for this project I hope to lay a meaningful foundation on a wider scale for future research where there can be a deeper reflection of the vast web of interwoven elements in contemporary Chinese art, leading to a greater discussion and exploration of Chinese women artists.

This thesis represents only the beginning of an investigation into this valuable cultural epoch. Future research should consider other women artists and their experiences, like Lin Tianmiao and Cai Jin. Another angle could be to examine how the younger generation of women artists (generally born in the 1970s and after), like Cao Fei and Peng Yu, have fared in terms of representation. By positioning the lack of representation of women artists in conversation with Chinese cultural conditions, I identify sociopolitical influences that have influenced the lack of representation during the ’85 New Wave. My aim was to enhance the visibility of women artists by beginning a discourse about the challenges that they face, in hopes of establishing the impetus to begin looking beyond and to new means of research.

In conclusion, my thesis argues it is imperative for the contemporary Chinese art world to thoughtfully reconsider these cultural conditions such that contemporary Chinese women artists receive the full representation and space owed to them. Such a step would necessarily

result in steps towards redefining and shaping the future of Chinese contemporary art by women, in order to transform the scholastic space for a more complex and nuanced analysis.

. . . . .

In the title of this thesis, 'woman' has a third tone mark over the 'o.' To anyone who does not know the Mandarin Chinese pinyin system, it could perhaps read as 'woman' with a typo.[118] However, reading 'women' with the third tone changes its meaning from 'woman' into the pronoun 'we.' By beginning this dialogue – one that I believe was catalyzed in part by Xiao Lu's *Dialogue* – I am demanding that it is no longer just women whom the burden of truth falls upon, but all of us. Without a greater representation of women artists in contemporary Chinese art, the Chinese art world risks losing a vital and integral part of its entirety.[119]

[118] This was indeed the case during Plan II thesis symposium.
[119] Xu, "Walking Out of the Abyss," 133.

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Biography

Valerie Chang is graduating “purely Plan II.” From Sugar Land, Texas, Valerie spent much of her time acting with the Broccoli Project, interning at the Blanton Museum of Art, and loitering in Elsie’s office. The summer following graduation she will intern with the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City, New York. She hopes to pursue a career in museum education, maybe attend graduate school much (*much*) further down the line to further this thesis thing, and achieve full fluency in Mandarin Chinese. Her favorite artwork is *The Kiss* by Gustav Klimt.